

NEW MUSIC CONCERTS

ROBERT AITKEN
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

presents

The celebrated and respected

JOHN CAGE

JAMES JOYCE, MARCEL DUCHAMP &
ERIC SATIE: ALPHABET

April 3, 1981
8:00 p.m.



MacMillan Theatre, Edward Johnson Bldg., University of Toronto

JOHN CAGE

John Cage is one of the most significant figures in contemporary musical thought. In the course of his illustrious career he has pioneered the development of the percussion orchestra, experimented with the use of noise, introduced the prepared piano, been an early proponent of electronic and taped music, originated the multi-media 'happening', initiated the use of chance and indeterminate methods in western composition and pursued the notion of extended silence as musical material.

Born in Los Angeles on September 15, 1912, Cage studied composition with Henry Cowell and Arnold Schoenberg, and piano with Richard Buhling. During the latter half of the 1930's he actively organized percussion ensembles in California and Seattle, where he was engaged as a piano accompanist for a dance school. There he initiated music composition classes for dancers. From 1941-42 Cage taught at the School of Design in Chicago, then went on to New York to continue his close association with percussion and dance. There he organized concerts, collaborated with the dancer-choreographer Merce Cunningham, studied the music of Satie and Webern, and investigated Zen Buddhism.

Cage's associations with the pianist Robert Tudor and painter Robert Rauschenberg began in 1950. In 1952 he organized the Project of Music for Magnetic Tape, the first such group in the United States. The same year his Theatre Piece was presented in conjunction with the Cunningham dance group. This work was the first mixed-media event of its kind in the USA. Cage's widely diversified interests further involved him in studying Buckminster Fuller, Marshall McLuhan, Marcel Duchamp and the writings of Henry David Thoreau.

Cage's music has since the beginning, been innovative and experimental in nature. His earliest works were characterized by chromaticism, a confined range, static and concise presentation. In the late 1930's his music became more dramatic and propulsive in character, wherein he developed a proportional relationship between phrase lengths and the length of the entire composition on the basis of the elementary components of sound and silence. Cage's music is under constant evolution, exploring new ideas and techniques. In 1938 Cage introduces the prepared piano, in which the sounds were altered by means of screws, bolts, pieces of wood and other materials to produce finely differentiated sounds of multiple and complex pitches and indefinite pitches. The music composed for this instrument emphasized the percussive qualities, and the melodic and resonant effects possible, especially in ostinato passages.

Cage delved into the sphere of electronic music in the 1950's, and also began to utilize elements of chance as a means of liberation, both psychological and technical in his instrumental works. The use of aleatory was influenced by Cage's interests in Zen philosophies of aesthetics, wherein art is considered to imitate nature in both her manner and operation. Cage extended his explorations further, to that of silence. He theorized that there is no such thing as silence and that the understanding of music as a duality of sound and silence was errant. He focused subsequent works on the concept that the purpose of a performance was 'within the jurisdiction of the performers' and listeners' activities, and that no preference could be made between "musical" sounds and "other" sounds. The work 4'33" radically demonstrates this period. The accent of aleatoric techniques was based on the concept that the piece is really a process rather than product. Cage also indicated his interest

in music as theatre early on in his career, concerned with the public and social character of music, he composed for film, dance and theatre.

John Cage has attained the respect of a wide public. He was the Regent's Lecturer at the University of California at San Diego (1980), was a Fellow of the Center for Advanced Studies at Wesleyan University and the University of Illinois. Cage has published 7 writings and 6 graphic works, and his music has been recorded extensively. His works have been broadcasted internationally. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1949 and an Award from the National Academy of Arts and Letters.

We are honoured to present this remarkably creative artist whose music is not only a part of our lives but who has made all life a part of his music.